

Minutes of Leaseholder Focus Group

Date: 14<sup>th</sup> August 2024

Committee Room 3, Civic Centre 2-4 p.m.

Present:

Katy Baker KB Leasehold Services & Right to Buy Officer

James Williams JW Specialist Income Management Officer

Chris Houlihan, Divisional Manager, Axis

Mr M Smith, MS Leaseholder

Mrs J Eggett, JE Leaseholder

Ms Y Doyle, YD Leaseholder

Mr J Clarke, JC Leaseholder

Mr Ian Burgess Leaseholder

Mr Ian Ward Leaseholder

	Agenda	Action
1	<b>Welcome</b>	
1.1	<b>KB</b> welcomed attendees	
2	<b>Apologies</b>	None

3	<p><b>Terms of Reference</b></p> <p><b>Housekeeping complete</b></p>	
4	<p><b>KB</b> opened the meeting, welcoming <b>CH</b> from Axis. <b>CH</b> said they were 35 days into the new contract. They had TUPE staff as well as some new resource. They are a medium sized company that uses direct employees as well as some sub-contractors to undertake works. <b>CH</b> said they will try to improve on the standards of the previous contractor. He said the new contract did include penalties for under-performance. He said the contract did affect Leaseholders because they cover repairs to the buildings which are not just for tenants. <b>CH</b> explained that they had inherited some jobs and felt it was reasonable to expect to take 3 months to clear the backlog. <b>JC</b> asked who decided whether to use direct labour or a subcontractor and which trade (e.g roofer or plumber)? <b>CH</b> advised that Axis was empowered to decide. <b>JC</b> asked who would monitor the quality of work carried out. <b>CH</b> advised that there were site supervisors but also some would be checked by SEH surveyors. <b>JC</b> asked about persistent issues such as recurring leaks, when would Axis decide a job was a recurrence or a new job? <b>CH</b> advised that they would consider a problem a recurrence if it happened within 6 months and a new job thereafter. <b>JC</b> said he would like a SEH surveyor to attend a meeting. <b>KB</b> said we would try to arrange this.</p> <p><b>JC</b> said out of hours provision is very variable and sometimes people are told to wait until 9AM and the return of daytime services even for emergencies. <b>JC</b> said he would like to see detail in the contract to require that emergency accommodation be provided if required – for example if the lifts break down and a resident is disabled. He said being trapped out of your home is a consideration as well as being trapped in a lift. <b>KB</b> advised that we would seek to use constructive criticism to improve services. <b>CH</b> said he hoped that the use of chat bot technology would help to ensure better services especially with technical problems that call centre staff might not understand fully. <b>JC</b> advised that sometimes general problems are treated as individual problems, and it could take several different residents to report an issue before it was treated as a general problem rather than an individual issue. For example, a leak affecting many flats might initially be thought to just affect one. He said this was especially problematic if the reporting resident was a leaseholder because he said leaseholders get ignored when reporting repairs. <b>JW</b> and <b>KB</b> said they had tried to improve the understanding of leaseholders repairing rights with the contact centre and would continue to do so.</p>	Try to get a repairs surveyor to attend meeting
5	<p><b>KB</b> advised Leaseholders about sale packs, detailing the kind of information they contained. <b>JE</b> said when she had needed a sale pack, the Leasehold Team had been very quick and efficient in providing this and her solicitor had been impressed as was she.</p>	
6	<p><b>KB</b> advised that we had asked for any agenda items but had not had any back from leaseholders. She reminded that leaseholders are always welcome to raise issues for the agenda.</p>	
7	<p><b>KB</b> asked if there was any other business. <b>JC</b> raised the itemisation of charges – saying that he had previously been told that leaseholders are charged for the hours an employee is on site.</p>	

	<p>He felt that sometimes employees are on site doing nothing rather than doing the job they are paid for.</p> <p>In respect of grounds maintenance, he said in the last few years the quality of mowing has improved due to the use of new machines, but he felt the cost of the new machines ought not to be charged to leaseholders. He said things had deteriorated recently however, with “No Mow May” and several staff being off sick. Whilst sympathising, he felt if the service was not being provided then they should not have to pay for it. He had an issue with calling mowing the grass grounds maintenance – he said they did not do weeds, and this resulted in an ever-shrinking area of grass to mow because of ingress of weeds at the edges of the grass area. He suggested an officer from GM should visit and re-evaluate the actual area of grass to mow or include weeding so that the full area of grounds is maintained. <b>KB</b> said we can feed this back to the new contractor -SEPS.</p>	
7	<p><b>IW</b> raised the use of and recycling of plastics. He said Veola expect residents to sort through plastics but explained that different plastics require different recycling. Did Veola separate out the different plastics to correctly recycle them? He wanted to know he was not wasting his time separating items that would just go to landfill. <b>KB</b> and <b>JW</b> said this was outside the remit of a leaseholder meeting, though Leasehold Services could try to get an answer.</p> <p><b>IW</b> raised the dropping of glass bottles from upper floor windows and asked if broken glass could be cleared? <b>KB</b> said this ought to be done by caretakers.</p> <p><b>JC</b> said there was no management structure in Estate Services, and they don’t get back to you if you have a query. <b>IW</b> said they don’t like it if you provide video or photographic evidence of a problem.</p> <p><b>IB</b> raised his gate. <b>JW</b> advised although freeholder is responsible for the structure and exterior of the property it was not likely to include maintenance of his gate, but we would check his lease.</p>	<p>Research Veola</p> <p>Check lease</p>
	Next meeting 13 <sup>th</sup> November 2025 then 26 <sup>th</sup> February 2025 Committee room 3 2-4PM	

8	<p><b>LFG - KB</b> asked how we might improve LFGs? <b>KB</b> advised we have considered guest speakers and inviting a surveyor, Fire Safety Officer, Caretaking to attend. <b>JC</b> said he felt quarterly was too far apart and asked if they could be bi-monthly? He said we should put the outcomes of LFGs on the website.</p>	
9	<p><b>Any other business</b></p>	

9.1	<p><b>HM</b> complained about repairs – said nothing ever gets followed up. She said she had reported a cover missing from a stack pipe and it had not been replaced. She said a condenser boiler had been installed at her property by South Essex Homes and bits were dropping off it, she had reported it but nothing was done. She said her windows leak. <b>JW</b> advised Leaseholders responsible for glass and South Essex Homes are responsible for frames, so it could be reported as a repair. <b>JC</b> said if you call Customer Services, you say you are a leaseholder and you get told to write in. He said there were repairs that have been outstanding for 2 years. <b>HM</b> said cleaners are useless. <b>JE</b> said she thought the cleaners were good. <b>HM</b> said the lifts are often out of order. <b>JC</b> said if you ask for a communal repair out of hours, you get told they will not do a communal repair out of hours. He said the contact centre does not have details of names of leaseholders out of hours. <b>JW</b> advised there is a list of leaseholders and contact details which is available 24/7. <b>KB</b> also advised it is a contractual obligation for leaseholders to update us with their tenant details. <b>NI</b> said contractors refused to deal with Leaseholders.</p>	<p>*check repair raised. *CS Training</p>
9.1	<p><b>JE</b> said they had problems with children from Belfairs School trespassing and not closing gates. <b>JC</b> suggested a spring closer on the gates. <b>JW</b> suggested raise with Youth Engagement Team.</p>	<p>*Liaise with YET</p>
9.1	<p><b>JC</b> complained that window cleaning standards are abysmal and asked if anyone ever inspected what contractors were supposed to be doing? He said he opposed the current contractors whom he said are not fulfilling the terms of their contract. He said we get estimates and go for the cheapest, but we do not seem to ask if the estimates are reasonable. <b>NI</b> asked if S20 notices could be easier to understand. <b>JC</b> said they ought to be sent recorded, or at least by FCP. <b>JW</b> advised if they were sent recorded, they would cost leaseholders more, but they are sent by FCP. <b>HM</b> asked how the Reserve Fund worked. <b>JW</b> explained it assisted leaseholders to budget for any expensive major repairs programmes. He advised leaseholders can opt out of the RF programme. <b>JC</b> said not everyone got the RF Letters advising of the option to opt out. <b>HM</b> said she wanted to opt out. <b>NI</b> raised an issue of some spotlights which he said are tungsten and cost a lot to run – he asked if they could be changed for efficient LEDs?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raise inspections and contract compliance measures.</li> </ul>
10	<p><b>Date/Time of next Meeting – Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> November 2024 4pm pm to 5pm</b></p>	